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School Committee Minutes 02-11-2003

THE ARLINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2003
7:30 PM

Present: David McKenna, Chair
Suzanne Owayda, Vice-Chair
Paul Schlichtman, Secretary
Barbara Goodman
Joani LaMachia
Denis Sullivan
Martin Thrope

Superintendent: Kay Donovan
Chief Financial Officer: David Kale
Special Education Director: Marilyn Bisbicos
Student Representative: Sean Garballey

Absent: Joanne Gurry

Call to Order: 7:40 PM

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None

ARMENIAN EXCHANGE PROGRAM

Jill Lewis spoke requesting to post literature relative to the CYSA State Department sponsored trip to Armenia in June and July. School Committee members stated that information could be posted as long as it is clear that it is not a school sponsored trip. Ms. Lewis will work with AHS principal Steve Woodcock on the wording of the flyers.

BUDGET

Supt. Donovan reported that at the joint meeting of the Board of Selectmen, Finance Committee, and School Committee Meeting Monday night the Arlington Public School Budget was presented. Mrs. Donovan reported that Acting Town Manager Nancy Galkowski spoke relative to how the estimated shortfall of \$8.1 million for the next fiscal year has now increased to \$13 million dollars

CFO David Kale reviewed a handout of FY03-04 revenues and expenditures. Mr. Kale explained the current year revenues for fiscal year 2002-2003 and the estimated changes in revenues for FY03-04 as of February 3rd as well as the estimated current year expenditures FY 2002-2003 and the estimated changes in expenditures for FY30-40 and how the shortfall was reached.

Mr. Kale pointed out that some of the numbers are estimated but will firm up over the next few weeks. The \$915,000.00 current shortfall will be made up through the free cash account and through expenditure savings.

Ms. Goodman stated that The Committee must take some initiative in determining a timeline in which to present to the voters relative to an override. David Kale stated that the next step is for the Finance Committee to look at all the town budgets, allocate the fixed costs and to review the O'Neill Formula.

.. **Budget Reduction Impact Discussion**

.. **Elementary Schools**

Stratton School principal Alan Brown and Bishop School principal Steve Carme spoke on behalf of all the elementary schools on the impact of the budget cuts. In their statement the principals emphasized that "everyone of theses

reductions will have an impact on current programming and collectively they will be devastating.” At the elementary level impact will be felt in terms of:

- “ Increased class size with 25-30 students per class
 - “ Reduced interaction with teachers
 - “ Longer time in assessments and early intervention
 - “ Increases in special education referrals
 - “ Lack of integrated class curriculum with specialists (art, ace, music, Spanish, library) since students would meet with specialists only once every two or three weeks instead of the current schedule of one specialist per day.
 - “ Emotional support for children and families would be reduced with the projected cuts in social workers
- Mr. Brown and Mr. Carne ended their presentation by stating that “in spite of the uncertain atmosphere created by the proposed reductions the professionalism of the staff in all of our schools has not been compromised.”

“ **Ottoson Middle School**

Stavroula Bouris, Principal of Ottoson Middle School presented how the budget cuts would affect the middle school.

Ms. Bouris read the schools’ mission statement that is the foundation of the school climate and with the budget cuts the mission will be challenged and everything that has been put into place is in jeopardy. Projected changes include:

- “ Restructuring sixth grade clusters from five small clusters to three clusters of approximately 115 students.
- “ Average class size of 25-26 students for 6th grade students and up to 30 students per class in grades 7 & 8.
- “ Less individualized instruction
- “ Less communication with parents
- “ Lack of flexibility in scheduling heterogeneous groups
- “ Elimination of band, orchestra and chorus during the school day
- “ Students having to chose electives
- “ Elimination of counselors and nursing staff will jeopardize the safety and mental well being of students.

Ms. Bouris explained that the elimination of an assistant principal would affect discipline issues being unresolved due to increased workload and would come across as more of a punishment instead of a learning experience. In her closing statement Ms. Bouris stated “with the re-shifting of staff through out the system, the well-trained exceptional teachers will be lost. It is sad to thing that the next generation of Arlington students will have their education jeopardized.”

“ **Arlington High School**

AHS principal Steve Woodcock delivered a presentation of cuts from the proposed budget. Mr. Woodcock stated that under proposed reductions AHS would lose 16 faculty members, which translates into 80 class sections or instruction for 2,000 students. In addition Mr. Woodcock emphasized that every department will be negatively impacted.

Examples Mr. Woodcock presented are as follows:

- “ Increased class size
- “ Reduction of science labs
- “ Elimination of some foreign language offerings
- “ Increased study periods-fewer electives available
- “ Elimination of advanced level courses
- “ Combination of Reach-up and STEP programs
- “ Elimination of one house office
- “ Less supervision for school events
- “ New graduation requirements put on hold

Mr. Woodcock in closing stated that “Arlington High School and the unique culture that has been created and nurtured will be irrevocable damaged”.

Break

SPECIAL EDUCATION UPDATE

Special Education Director Marilyn Bisbicos reviewed the report on Special Education Finance Data Update by the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents. MASS formed a subcommittee that analyzed the data on enrollment, rising costs of special education, and the impact of those costs on all new money coming into school districts. The report found a number of trends since 1999, what was found is that

- “ Almost all new money coming into school systems were not used not for education reform or for staff development & program management, but to pay the unexpected costs and overages in special education.
- “ The costs were for an increased number of students coming into school with severe, substantial special needs

over and above expectations and past experiences.

- “ Special education enrollment in Massachusetts is not increasing, but slightly decreasing
- “ A huge rise in the number of young children coming into special education with moderate to severe disabilities
- “ While enrollment is decreasing, the cost increase for special education services has risen 113%; the cost increase for health services has risen 147%,. With only a 50% cost increase is regular education. The cost increases reflect the trend of children with severe disabilities requiring a wider range of health services including nurses, inhalation specialists, physical and occupational therapists as well as tutors, who treat children with seizure disorders, tumors, kidney dialysis and cancer.
- “ Trends in Massachusetts are very reflective of what is happening in Arlington; essentially the special education enrollment is not increasing but number of students with severe medial disabilities that require specialists drive up the costs
- “ Arlington currently has 91 out of district students

Ms. Goodman requested a subcommittee meeting of the special student services to study the statewide figures, look at out of district students, residential and non-collaborative programs.

APPROVAL OF WARRANT

On a motion by Ms. LaMachia and seconded by Ms. Owayda it was unanimously Voted to approve warrant article # 031303 in the amount of \$676,126.08

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Mr. Schlichtman reviewed correspondence

On a motion by Mr. Schlichtman and seconded by Mr. Thrope it was unanimously Voted to approve the regular meeting minutes of January 14. 2003 as amended.

PTBC UPDATE

Ms. Owayda reported:

- “ All pending change orders at the Peirce School have been resolved.
- “ The PTBC reviewed designs for the Stratton and Thompson Schools by Design Partnership of Cambridge.
- “ A memo from David Driscoll, Commissioner of Education, on the SBAB –Status of Current Application that read in part that the DOE will “impose a moratorium on any further review or approval of pending school construction applications. I expect this moratorium to last until at least the end of this fiscal year. We will reevaluate the situation after the FY04 state budget is enacted.” For the Dallin School it means that it remains on list, Arlington may start construction prior to being reached on the list but the timeframe as to when The Town would be reimbursed remains unknown.

Chair, Dave McKenna requested that the memo be included as part of the official minutes and that a copy of the memo be sent to the Board of Selectmen.

NEW BUSINESS

- “ Mr. Thrope requested that a discussion on the MCAS and the high school graduation requirement, be placed on the agenda for discussion
- “ Supt. Donovan will set up a guidance task force within the next few weeks
- “ The final accreditation was received on January 24th; Supt. Donovan reported that copies must be distributed within 60 days of receipt. It may possibly be ready for the next meeting.
- “ The budget subcommittee will meet at 6:00 pm before the next school committee meeting (February 25th)

On a motion made by Mr. Sullivan and seconded it was Voted to enter executive session to discuss a legal issue and a personnel issue with no further business to be conducted except to adjourn. Roll Call; Unanimous

Executive Session 10:35 – 11:05 pm

On a motion made and seconded it was voted to adjourn at 11:05 pm

Submitted by
Karen Tassone
Committee Secretary